Government House

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Government House

Since 1883, the stately three-storey mansion known as Government House has been the residence of Manitoba's lieutenant-governors. Located at 10 Kennedy Street in the heart of downtown Winnipeg, it has housed sixteen of the province's nineteen federal officers and served as a centre of political and social activity. Over the years its doors have been opened to welcome royalty and statesmen, artists and scientists, teachers and preachers — the famous, the infamous and common folk alike. More importantly, perhaps, it has served as a constant reminder of this province's political evolution and as a symbol of the nation's constitutional heritage.

The office of lieutenant-governor has changed dramatically since Manitoba joined Confederation in 1870. Whereas the incumbent was once a governor with the power to reserve bills and to make and unmake ministries, the lieutenant-governor is now considered a social leader and political figurehead, whose powers "to warn, to encourage and be consulted" are rarely exercised. Although still legally the federal government's officer and the sovereign's representative, the lieutenant-governor has not exercised significant political authority over the workings of the provincial government since early in the century.

As the political powers of the office diminished, the important social functions increased. Since the position was first instituted, the lieutenant-governor has always been called upon to open or prorogue the sessions of the provincial legislature and to give his or her assent to legislation. The incumbent has also been expected to take an active interest in all forms of social or public activity — to entertain state guests, preside at special state functions, participate in local and national festivities and celebrations and hear the concerns of local citizens and interest groups. During the last century, these social duties have demanded most, if not all, of the lieutenant-governors' time.

Given the diminution of the office's political rank, "Government House" may now seem to be an odd title for the lieutenant-governor's home. In all likelihood, the name dates back to the early days of the province when the incumbent's residence actually had some status as a seat of government. At that time, Government House had a dual function: it served as the lieutenant-governor's office, a place where certain governmental and administrative decisions were made, and as his home, which served as a centre of state hospitality. Although the residence has long since ceased to serve this dual purpose, the name has remained as an important link with the past.

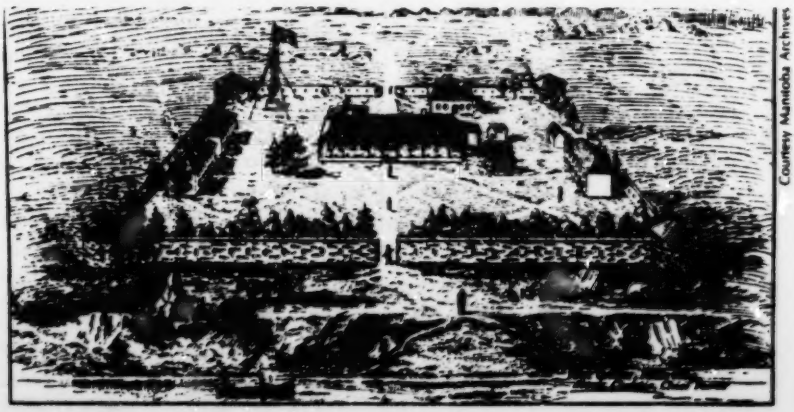
Early Governor's Residences at Red River and Fort Garry

Prior to 1870 the area now known as the province of Manitoba was part of Rupert's Land, a vast fur trading empire owned and governed by the British-based Hudson's Bay Company (HBC). The company eventually established its commercial and administrative centre at Upper Fort Garry, near the junction of the Red and Assiniboine rivers. In 1820, George Simpson, HBC Governor of Rupert's Land made Upper Fort Garry his headquarters, and in 1837 the post became the centre for the governor and the Council of Assiniboia, a legislative body which tended to the affairs of the agricultural settlements that developed along the Red and Assiniboine.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Upper Fort Garry, the location of Governor Simpson's House, c. 1870

Governor George Simpson considered moving the fur trade headquarters further north on the Red River during the early 1830s. Lower Fort Garry was constructed and a large governor's house was built there, but this rarely served as the seat of government. Instead, the flood-damaged upper fort was rebuilt during the late 1830s, and in 1840 a large log house was constructed as the governor's official residence. The building was a nine by fifteen metre, two-storey structure with a cellar and possibly two side wings. In the 1850s, when the walls of the fort were extended, a bastion was constructed at the north end of the complex around the governor's home. The big house at the upper fort continued to serve as the governor's residence until the territory of Rupert's Land was transferred from the HBC to the Dominion Government of Canada. In 1870 Manitoba entered Confederation, and in 1872 the house at Upper Fort Garry was officially leased to the Dominion for use as the home of the province's first lieutenant-governor, Adams G. Archibald.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Lower Fort Garry, near Selkirk, Manitoba.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The Big House at Lower Fort Garry, 1857-58.

Although Archibald had intended to reside at the upper fort, he spent the spring and summer of 1871 at another location, Silver Heights. Built and owned by the Rowands, a prominent fur trade family, Silver Heights was located near the Assiniboine River on the old Portage Trail. In 1869 Colonel J.S. Dennis had rented the house for William McDougall, the man intended to represent the Dominion as governor of the newly acquired territory of Rupert's Land. The Riel Resistance of 1869 altered these plans. McDougall was refused entrance into the territory and returned to Canada without ever seeing Silver Heights. It was not until after the province of Manitoba was created in 1870, that the Rowand home actually served as a temporary "governor's house".

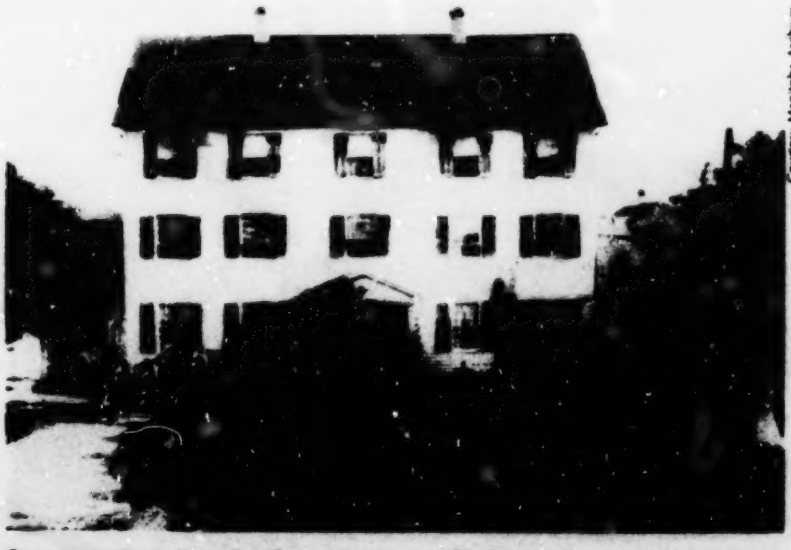
Archibald had serious reservations about the suitability of Silver Heights, and would have preferred to have stayed on at Upper Fort Garry. The house was located some eight kilometres from the upper fort, where all the business

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Silver Heights, the residence of Lieutenant-Governor Archibald, located on the old Portage Trail near the Assiniboine River.

of the province was centred. In the days of carriages, ox carts and canoes, eight kilometres was a considerable distance, and Archibald felt that this "remote" location would hamper his performance as lieutenant-governor. The log cottage was also quite small and the formal Canadian furniture that had been shipped out from the east was either too tall or too wide for the rooms. Despite his initial reservations, Archibald must have enjoyed the house and its pleasant rural surroundings because he recommended that the lease be renewed after September 1871. Matters were complicated when the Rowands put Silver Heights up for sale in the fall of that year. John McTavish of the HBC purchased the estate and then sold and transferred ownership to Donald A. Smith, an HBC Chief Commissioner, railway entrepreneur and notable politician.

With the sale of Silver Heights, Archibald moved to Upper Fort Garry and the residence which served as Government House until 1883. Alexander Morris, Archibald's successor, arrived in 1872 and described his new home in somewhat disparaging terms as a "rambling old apology for a government house." At this time the federal government was still paying for the rent and upkeep, and in 1873 finally consented to cover the cost of extensive renovations. A third storey was added at a price of $2,000 and the remaining $5,000 was apparently used to renovate the interior. By June 1874 when James A. Grahame of the HBC arrived at Fort Garry, he looked enviously at the lieutenant-governor's quarters, noting that his own dwelling was little more than a shed, "rotten from roof to foundation." It is no wonder that his dismay intensified when he discovered that the federal lease on the lieutenant-governor's house was good for at least another six years.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Government House, Upper Fort Garry, Winnipeg, in 1876: shown in the carriage are Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs. Alexander Morris.

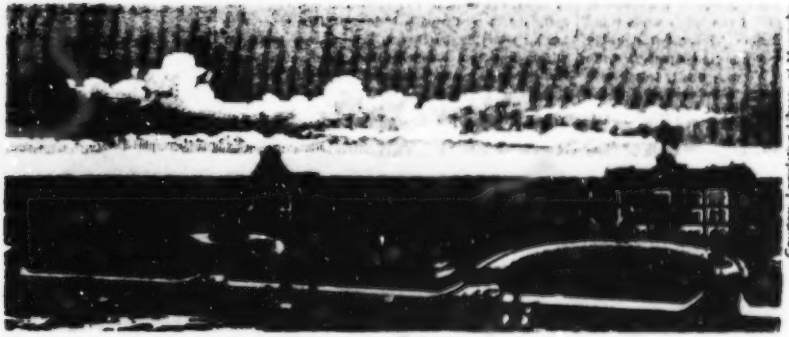
Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The remains of Upper Fort Garry, 1888: only the gate in the foreground remains standing.

Government House at Upper Fort Garry, with its twenty-three by sixty-one metre grounds, garden and cannon, continued to serve as the lieutenant-governor's home and office for almost a decade. The decline of the upper fort and the HBC's plans to dismantle the complex, prompted the federal government to begin work on a new Government House in the early 1880s. Once the new building was completed in 1883, the old house fell into disuse. It was removed five years later when the fort's remaining buildings were sold by auction on 26 March 1888. The once proud government house was bought by a Mr. Marion for $100.00, torn down and used as fire wood. By May 1888, Upper Fort Garry had virtually disappeared.

Number 10 Kennedy Street

The new lieutenant-governor's residence was located at 10 Kennedy Street in the City of Winnipeg on a piece of land which had been appropriated in 1872 as a twenty hectare Dominion and provincial government reserve. The property adjoined the western end of the Hudson's Bay Reserve and ran from the Assiniboine River, north to what is now York Avenue and west from Kennedy Street to present-day Osborne Street North. In 1874 this tract of land was divided down its length and the eastern half, which extended on both sides of Broadway, was designated as a provincial reserve. The southern portion of the reserve was seven hectares. At the northern end of this section the federal government constructed Manitoba's first provincial legislative buildings, and on the south side built Government House, the lieutenant-governor's residence. Work on both buildings was to commence in 1881, but Government House was completed in 1883, one year before the finishing touches were made to the legislative buildings.



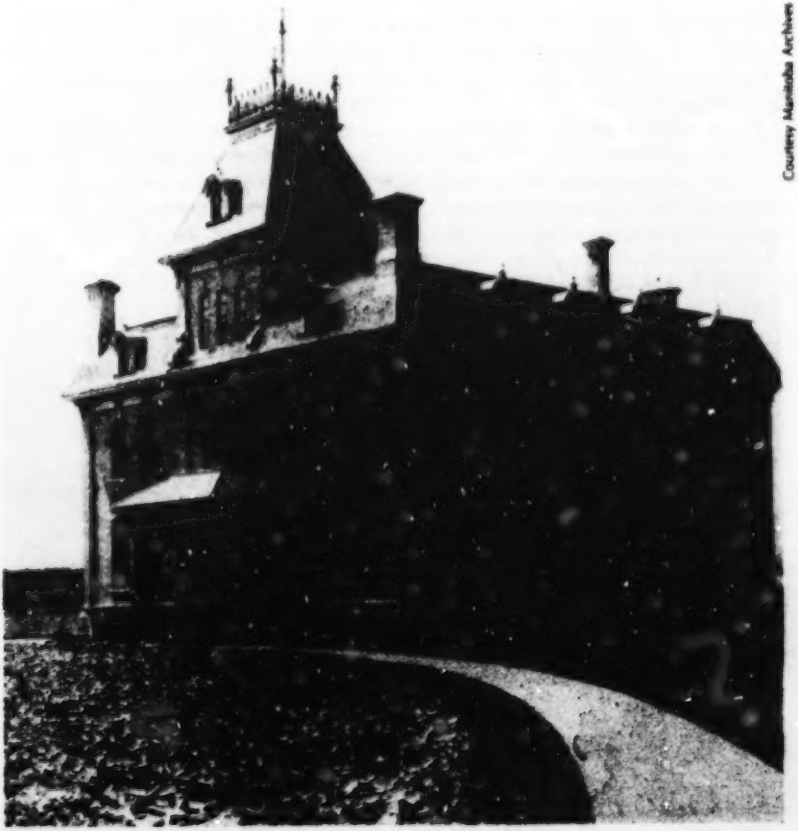
Courtesy Legislative Library of Manitoba

Government House, 10 Kennedy Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba (1882-84); the original provincial parliament building is shown nearby.

Courtesy Randy Bruder

The original provincial parliament building, demolished in 1920, was linked to Government House by its Second Empire styling.

The architectural designs for the house were drawn up by Mr. Thomas Scott and the staff of the Chief Architect's Office in the Department of Public Works, Canada. A simplified version of the Second Empire style was chosen for the three-storey mansion to compliment the nearby legislative buildings. Known as Second Empire because of its popularity in France during the Second Napoleonic Empire, this type of building was introduced to Canada in the 1860s. Its most prominent feature was a flat steep-sided Mansard roof. During the early 1880s, builders in Winnipeg constructed everything from warehouses to private residences in this style, but by the latter part of the decade it had fallen from favour. Despite its increasing unpopularity, the simple lines of the modified Second Empire style were understated and dignified, admirable qualities for the home of the province's lieutenant-governor. Government House is one of the few remaining examples of Second Empire architecture remaining in the province.



Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The earliest known photo of Government House, taken prior to the occupancy of J.C. Aikins.

Tenders on the building were called in 1881 and drew a number of bids from local and national construction companies. The two lowest were submitted by A. Charlebois of Montreal ($23,133) and Joseph Williams and Major F.J. Bowles of Selkirk ($23,995). Although Charlesbois' bid was somewhat lower, he would not guarantee his quote on Government House unless he also received the contract for the legislative building. John P. Lyons and Company of Ottawa had quoted a lower price on the latter and so Charlebois lost out on both fronts. The contract for the lieutenant-governor's residence was awarded to Williams and Bowles and work on the building began in early September 1882. By Christmas of that year the superstructure and tin roof were finished, and work on the house then proceeded under the direction of J.P.M. LeCourt, an eastern Canadian architect. Although the completion date was set for 1 May 1883, it was subsequently moved back to 1 July.

The interior of the residence and most of the outbuildings were completed during 1883. In March, Major Bowles had also received the contract for the stables and a combined wash-house, ice-house and woodshed. The stables were located approximately thirty-four metres southwest of the house to keep the "sweet" smell of the horses from drifting towards the residence. The second building was situated closer, some eleven metres from the southwest corner of the house, for the convenience of the servants who stocked the ice box and wood bins. Although the entire complex was not completely finished by 1 July, everything was in readiness by the time Lieutenant-Governor James Cox Aikins moved in during the third week of September. The house had already been connected to the telephone exchange, and it was only a few weeks before the pipes were laid to bring in fresh water via the Winnipeg Water Works.

A view of Kennedy Street, north of Assiniboine, c. 1905, showing the neighbourhood that faced the grounds of Government House.

The handsome, Mansard-roofed residence was located fifty-three metres west of Kennedy Street and offered its new occupant a pleasant view of the spacious lawns that stretched down towards the main thoroughfare. A semi-circular driveway cut its way around to the front of the house, where wooden walkways led up to the stairs. During the 1880s and 1890s, the area around Government House became quite a fashionable district as professionals and entrepreneurs such as R.D. Richardson, the stationer, Nicholas Bawlf, the grain merchant and W.H. Rourke, the builder, constructed their homes on Kennedy Street south of Broadway. Although less ostentatious than other homes in the area, Government House, with its large grounds and pronounced design, was certainly one of the most imposing.

The house was twelve metres high and nineteen by eighteen metres wide, with a mansard roofed tower, eighteen metres above grade. The best quality local white brick was used to construct the walls, while the above grade foundations, window sills and caps were made of limestone. The foundation below grade rested on oak piles thirty-eight centimetres in diameter driven nine metres into the ground, over which concrete footings were poured. Oak planks were laid on top of the footings, and these "sills" formed the base for the Stony Mountain rubble stone that continued up to ground level. In most private residences the rubble stone ran right up to the brick work, but in many public buildings such as the Eastern Judicial Jail (now Vaughan Street Detention Centre) and Government House, finely-cut limestone slabs were used above ground.

The combined strength of the oak pilings and concrete footings of the foundation were designed to compensate for damage that could have been

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The breakfast room, Government House, Kennedy Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, c. late 1890s, was originally designed as the lieutenant-governor's private office and now serves as the aide's room.

caused by the surrounding clay soil. Unstable and constantly shifting, the clay was a well-known problem plaguing many of the city's newer structures. The extra precautions taken in building the foundations of Government House may help to explain why it has remained standing, while other buildings, constructed during the same period, have long since fallen to the wrecker's ball.

Six steps led up to the porch and the heavy set of double oak doors, which formed the entranceway to Government House. A transom and two sidelights helped to brighten the path of night-time guests as they made their way through the doorway and into the main vestibule. This entrance hall was four by two metres and featured two glass floor openings which threw shafts of light down into the "still room," a basement chamber where preserves and liqueurs were prepared. The vestibule opened onto an outer hall which led into the governor's office, the inner hall and the drawing room.

Most guests would have been led directly into the magnificent inner hall, where an elegant oak staircase curved its way up to the second floor. Three storeys overhead was a rooftop lantern-light which lit the stairwell and hallway. The north doorway off the hall led into the six by five metre breakfast room, and the west door entered onto the seven by six metre drawing room. The portal on the west wall opened onto the eight by six metre dining room, which took up the southwest corner of the building. An adjoining serving room was connected to the basement kitchens, scullery room and storage rooms by a dumbwaiter and stairs. During state parties or large public functions, the folding doors between the library, breakfast room, drawing room and dining room could be thrown open to form a huge L-shaped reception area or ballroom.

Courtesy Legislative Library of Manitoba

The dining room, Government House, c. late 1890s, furnished here in the late Victorian style, was located in the southwest corner of the ground floor.

The light-well that stretched up from the main hall to the third storey formed a gallery or balcony on the second floor. Off the gallery were the dressing rooms, bathroom and bedrooms generally used by the lieutenant-governor's family and guests. Two large bedrooms at the rear of the house were connected by a set of folding doors which could be opened to create the six by sixteen metre royal suite. All of the main bedrooms on the second floor had a small fireplace, and a number featured beautiful marble-topped mahogany bedroom suites. A small staircase, off the bathroom-dressing room area on the south side of the house, led up to the attic storey. The servant's modest accommodations and a number of unfinished rooms were situated here. One of these unfinished chambers was apparently made into a billiard room.

The house was finished and furnished according to the formal tastes of the vice-regal resident. Thomas Dunn received the plastering contract and was responsible for the lovely curved ceiling cornices and other plaster ornamentation, while William MacKay received the painting contract. Very little of the original furniture from Government House at Fort Garry was moved over to the Kennedy Street residence: some was sent to government offices and the remainder was sold by the flamboyant Jim Coolican at an auction sale in October 1883. Walnut and ebonized wood furniture, more in keeping with the decor of the new house, was purchased in Toronto. Carpets were also ordered from Toronto and from the Hudson's Bay Company store on Main Street. The billiard table was supplied by Samuel May and Com-

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

The sitting room, Government House, c. late 1890s.

pany of Toronto, while D. Scott and Company of Winnipeg provided the mahogany bedroom suites and servants' furniture. The large furnace and boiler was made by a Montreal manufacturer, R. Carte and Company. All in all, it was a residence that offered "every modern convenience." As one local journal enthusiastically observed, "nothing, in fact, will be wanting to make this a fitting abode for the Lieut.-Governor of the great Province of Manitoba."

James Cox Aikins, the first of sixteen lieutenant-governors to reside at Government House, 10 Kennedy Street, was an easterner by birth. His previous experience as a politician, cabinet minister and senator provided him with excellent credentials for his work in Manitoba. He had served as Sir John A. Macdonald's secretary of state and registrar-general and thus helped to transform the territory of Rupert's Land into western Canada through his preparation of the Dominion Lands Act of 1872. The Macdonald government resigned in 1873 but returned to power in 1878. Aikins was once again appointed secretary of state and in 1880 was transferred to Inland Revenue.

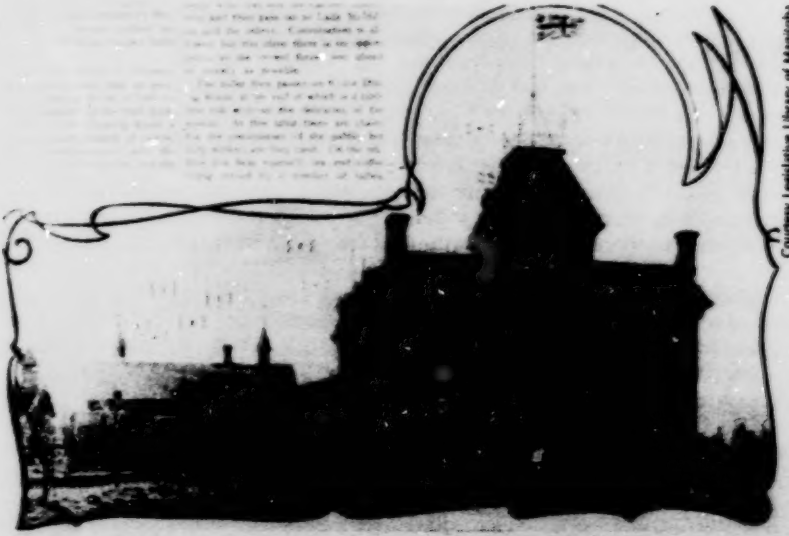
A falling out between Prime Minister Macdonald and Senator Aikins led to his appointment as lieutenant-governor in Manitoba, a remote posting considered ideal for "unwanted" politicians. Once Aikins received his appointment on 22 September 1882, he travelled west to join his son, James A.M. Aikins, the Canadian Pacific Railway lawyer and a man who would also become lieutenant-governor of the province. The senator took his oath on 2 December 1882 and became Manitoba's fourth lieutenant-governor. His tenure ended on 1 July 1888. After he returned to the East, he was reappointed to the Senate in 1896 and died on 8 August 1904.

Over the years, the house at 10 Kennedy underwent a number of changes. Rooms designated for one purpose came to serve others: a library became a drawing room, a second floor bedroom doubled as a ballroom and the lieutenant-governor's office became an aide's room, once the incumbent was given his own chambers at the legislative buildings. A conservatory, designed by Walter Chesterton, was added to the greenhouse in 1886, and a ballroom and verandah were added to the house around the turn of the century. Some of these were later torn down and replaced by other additions: a sunroom, an assembly room, a new garage and modern greenhouse. An important alteration was made in the 1940s when a kitchen wing was attached to the residence. Apparently the basement kitchen had become quite a nuisance, particularly on one occasion when, much to the dismay of the hostess, the dumbwaiter broke sending hot dishes clattering down the shaft.

Prior to 1885 the Dominion government in Ottawa provided fiscal aid and a large portion of the funding needed by the government of Manitoba. The federal administration also paid for the construction of the province's first legislative buildings and Government House. After 1885 Manitoba assumed responsibility for its own financial affairs, which included the cost of any renovations or alterations made to the lieutenant-governor's residence. By the mid-1890s Government House was in serious need of repair. During the winter of 1896-97 observers claimed that the house was barely habitable — the heating system needed overhauling; plumbing fixtures had to be renewed; and the hearths and fireplaces needed to be rebuilt and retiled. These and all subsequent repairs, renovations and extensions were paid for by the provincial government.

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

Looking east from the rear to the front drawing room in Government House, c. late 1890: this room now forms one of the larger spaces in Government House.



Courtesy Legislative Library of Manitoba

A view of Government House, Kennedy Street, c. late 1890s showing the greenhouse, ice house and stable, prior to the construction of the verandah on the north side of the house.

A Centre for State Hospitality

On 6 September 1870, Lieutenant-Governor Adams Archibald held a reception at Upper Fort Garry so that the general populace could meet and chat with the Canadian government's new representative in Manitoba. This marked the first of many social events organized and presided over by Manitoba's lieutenant-governors. Archibald followed the reception with a New Year's Levee held on 2 January 1871, a celebration which became an annual tradition. The event drew an ever-increasing number of citizens, and in 1971 the site of the New Year's Levee switchéd from 10 Kennedy Street to the more commodious corridors of the legislative buildings.

The first New Year's Levee held at the Kennedy Street residence provided curious citizens with an opportunity to view the handsome interior of the new house. According to one account the main hall had been tastefully decorated with festoons of evergreens, and a larger evergreen horseshoe, with the words "A Happy New Year" inscribed upon its white linen background, welcomed guests in the foyer. The event began at four in the afternoon and lasted for over two hours. A number of distinguished guests attended: Premier John Norquay and cabinet ministers Brown and LaRivière assisted His Honour and Mrs. Aikins, while American Consul James Wickes Taylor and Archbishop Robert Machray were among those who presented their calling cards before joining the reception. The main table in the dining hall was generously laid out with garnished platters of turkey, prairie chicken, partridge, duck, venison and other dishes for the enjoyment of the guests.

For a number of years the chatelains residing at Government House set aside one day a week as an "at home" where a variety of visitors were received for tea and conversation. Spring and summer garden parties held on the lawn of the lieutenant-governor's home were another popular form

Courtesy Manitoba Archives

A garden party at Government House, 9 August 1889.

of entertainment. Public celebrations, such as Queen Victoria's two jubilees, were held at Government House, as were the receptions which marked the opening of the provincial legislature. State dinners, receptions and balls, held in honour of distinguished visitors and guests, were often lavish affairs attended by hundreds of local personalities.

Many such functions were arranged for visiting royalty. There have been at least seven Royal visits to Manitoba, ranging from the 1901 tour of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall to the more recent stopover made by Princess Anne in 1982. During the 1939 tour of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, the royal couple arrived in Winnipeg on 24 May 1939 accompanied by Prime Minister Mackenzie King. They were met at the train station and whisked to Government House where frantic last minute preparations were being made for a luncheon. Special radio equipment had been set up in the library, and at one o'clock that afternoon the King broadcast to the empire. The table which he used now bears a small brass plaque and photograph commemorating the event.

Visits by the Governors-General of Canada have also been frequent. Since the transcontinental tour of Lord Lansdowne in the fall of 1885, every presiding governor-general has been a guest at 10 Kennedy Street. On one occasion, in July 1900, Lord and Lady Minto travelled to the city to open the Winnipeg Fair. The couple arrived in the evening and were greeted by Lieutenant-Governor Patterson. The houses along the route from the station were lit-up in welcome, and Lord and Lady Minto were accompanied by a torchlight procession and a score of bands. When they arrived at Government House, they found the grounds decorated with Chinese lanterns and the house ablaze with coloured electric lights.

Other guests who stayed at Government House included Winston Churchill and one-time British High Commissioner, Lord Amory. Its doors have been opened to welcome John Phillip Sousa, Billy Graham, Princess Christina of Sweden, Laurens Van der Post, Lord and Lady Baden Powell and Canadian author, Margaret Laurence. British songstress Gracie Fields paid a visit and world renowned actress, Sarah Bernhardt, was entertained at tea by Lady Aikins. During the war years, visitors from as far away as the Gold Coast, New Zealand and Switzerland signed the guest register. No doubt other names will be added to the list as Manitoba's lieutenant-governors continue their work as the province's good will ambassadors.

The year 1983 marked the centennial of Government House. Few buildings in Manitoba have reached their hundredth year still serving the same function for which they were originally intended. Indeed, there are not many vice-regal residences in Canada which have marked their hundredth anniversary. Government House in Winnipeg is the fourth oldest lieutenant-governor's residence and the fifth oldest Government House in the country. It is now situated in close proximity to three buildings which symbolize the political and administrative heart of this province: Frank Simon's grand Legislative Building, Samuel Hooper's Land Titles Office and Victor Horwood's Law Courts Building and Power House. Although somewhat overpowered by the still formalism of the large limestone structures nearby, Government House remains an important landmark in the City of Winnipeg and an integral part of the political and social life of this province.

Suggestions for Further Reading

A pamphlet entitled *Manitoba's Government House* prepared by Frances Bowles for the Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba (1970), is an excellent source on the history of the lieutenant-governors' residences. For information on the governor's residences at the upper and lower forts see: George Ingram," The Big House, Lower Fort Garry" in *Occasional Papers in Archaeology and History No. 4* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1970) and Rodger C. Guinn, "The Red-Assiniboine Junction: A Land Use and Structural History, 1770-1980," a report prepared for Parks Canada, Prairie Region, Winnipeg. The reader may also wish to consult a pamphlet prepared by the Historic Resources Branch, Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation entitled, *Silver Heights*.

Studies which examine the general role of the lieutenant-governor within the Canadian system of government include: John T. Saywell, *The Office of Lieutenant-Governor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957) and John Castell Hopkins, "Review of the Constitutional History of Canada" in *Canada: An Encyclopedia of the Country Vol. V* (Toronto: Linscott Publishing Company, 1895).

Credits:

The cover photograph of Government House, c.1910, is printed courtesy of The Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

Government House

Government House is the official residence of the Lieutenant-Governor of Manitoba. The present structure was completed by the Dominion Government in 1883 and transferred to Manitoba's jurisdiction in 1885 symbolizing the completion of Manitoba's parliamentary political structure.

The first building known as Government House was occupied by Louis Riel as President of the Provincial Government of Red River in 1869-1870.

In 1870 Manitoba's first Lieutenant-Governor, the Honourable Adams G. Archibald, chose as Government House the residence of the last Governor of Rupert's Land, owned by the Hudson's Bay Company and located in Upper Fort Garry. The Fort Garry residence remained Government House until it was replaced by the present structure.